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Security Council

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Statement by the President of the Security Council

At the 4933rd meeting of the Security Council, held on 25 March 2004, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "Cross-border issues in West Africa", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council, recalling its relevant resolutions and the statements of its President, emphasizes the importance of addressing the continuing factors of instability in West Africa within a regional framework. It recognizes the need for a comprehensive and composite approach for durable solutions to the complex crises and conflicts in West Africa. Such an approach should address the root causes of conflict and consider means to promote sustainable peace and security including development and economic revival, good governance and political reform.

"The Security Council takes note in this regard of the report of the Secretary-General dated 12 March 2004 (S/2004/200) and its recommendations to address cross-border issues, in particular the plight of child-soldiers and the use and proliferation of mercenaries and small arms, within the context of a regional approach. The Security Council believes action on the report should be taken as part of a wider strategy of conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict stabilization in the sub-region.

"The Security Council welcomes the principles set out by the African Union and NEPAD which provide an important framework for such action. It encourages ECOWAS Member States to ensure that these are fully implemented. It consequently urges ECOWAS to work closely with the United Nations system, the international financial institutions and the other international and regional organizations concerned including the newly established African Union Peace and Security Council, as well as with interested States, in drafting a regional conflict prevention policy taking fully into account the recommendations of the recent joint United Nations and European Union mission to the region.

"The Security Council stresses the importance of the role of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa in facilitating the coordination of a coherent United Nations approach to cross-order and transnational problems in the sub-region.

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"The Security Council encourages the Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa to continue to hold regular meetings on coordination among the United Nations missions in the region in the interest of improved cohesion and maximum efficiency of United Nations activities in West Africa. It also encourages the greatest possible harmonization among United Nations agencies within countries of the sub-region.

"The Security Council requests the Secretary-General to encourage the United Nations missions in West Africa to share information and their logistic and administrative resources as far as possible, without impeding the satisfactory execution of their respective mandates, in order to increase their effectiveness and reduce costs.

"The Security Council expresses its intention to consider the Secretary-General's recommendations to facilitate cross-border operations and to strengthen cooperation among the United Nations missions in the region, including the possibility of "hot pursuit" operations, joint air patrolling, shared border responsibility, the possible reinforcement of airspace monitoring and joint planning for the repatriation of foreign combatants. It looks forward to receiving as soon as possible the Secretary-General's recommendations after due consultation with the Governments concerned. It also encourages the States in the sub-region to organize common patrols along their respective borders, jointly if need be with the respective United Nations peacekeeping operations.

"The Security Council invites the Secretary-General and ECOWAS to take the requisite practical decisions to improve the coordination of United Nations and ECOWAS activities in West Africa.

"The Security Council stresses the importance of a regional approach in the preparation and implementation of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programmes. To this end it invites the United Nations missions in West Africa, the Governments concerned, the appropriate financial institutions, international development agencies and donor countries to work together to harmonize individual country DDR programmes within an overarching regional strategy to design community development programmes to be implemented alongside DDR programmes, and to pay special attention to the specific needs of children in armed conflict.

"The Security Council reiterates the importance of finding durable solutions to the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the sub-region and urges the States in the region to promote necessary conditions for their voluntary and safe return with the support of relevant international organizations and donor countries.

"The Security Council considers that illegal trafficking in arms poses a threat to international peace and security in the region. It, therefore, urges the ECOWAS Member States to fully implement their moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of light weapons signed in Abuja on 31 October 1998. It also invites them to study the possibility of strengthening its provisions.

"The Security Council invites the ECOWAS Member States to take all necessary steps to better combat illegal trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the region, such as the establishment of a regional register of small

arms and light weapons. The Security Council calls on donor countries to help the ECOWAS Member States implement these steps.

"The Security Council urges all States, in particular those in the region and those with a capacity to export arms, to ensure that arms embargoes are fully implemented in the sub-region. It expresses its intention to pay close attention and remain in consultation with ECOWAS and Member States on steps to stop the illicit flows of arms to conflict zones in the region.

"The Security Council recognizes the need to address both the supply and demand side with regard to private companies selling illegally small arms or security services and invites the Governments concerned to take appropriate steps to prevent such illegal sales.

"The Security Council recalls the measures it has implemented on the illegal exploitation and trade of diamonds and timber in the sub-region and encourages ECOWAS and its Member States to promote transparent and sustainable exploitation of these resources.

"The Security Council encourages ECOWAS to publicly identify parties and actors who are shown to engage in illicit trafficking of small arms in the sub-region and use mercenaries, and expresses its intention to consider adopting such practice in relation to the conflicts in West Africa.

"The Security Council recalls that the existence of the many illegitimate checkpoints and the practice of extortion at them in the region harms the security of civilians and is a major stumbling block to the economic development of all West Africa. It therefore invites the Governments concerned to take the necessary steps to effectively address this impediment to regional economic integration with the support of the international community.

"The Security Council calls on the ECOWAS Member States to work together to agree a coherent approach to the problem of foreign combatants.

"The Security Council calls on the Mano River Union States to resume dialogue and consider holding a summit of Heads of State and meetings of Ministers to develop a common approach to their shared security issues and confidence-building measures.

"The Security Council considers that civil society actors, including the media, have an important role to play in crisis management and conflict prevention in the region and that their efforts in this regard deserve to be actively supported by the regional States, ECOWAS, the international community and the United Nations system. Increased support should be provided for the media to raise awareness about the plight of child-soldiers, the use and proliferation of small arms and the recruitment of mercenaries.

"The Security Council welcomes the consideration being given in the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL) to broadening its mandate to the cross-border issues concerning Liberia and its neighbouring countries.

"The Security Council considers reform of the security sector an essential element for peace and stability in West Africa and urgently calls on donor countries and the international financial community to coordinate their efforts

to support ECOWAS, in particular its Executive Secretariat, and to assist the States in the sub-region in their efforts to reform the security sector.

"The Security Council, in the context of its emphasis on the regional dimension of the problems in West Africa, expresses its intention to keep under review the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations and requests the Secretary-General to report on them at the occasion of his regular reports on the United Nations missions in the sub-region."